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July 26, 1999

Attention: Rick Breitenbach
CALFED BAY-DELTA PROGRAM
1416 Ninth Street, Suite 1155
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Mr. Breitenbach:

As a member of Cal Trout and the human race, I am obviously concerned about the decisions of CALFED because they will affect me, my family and grandchildren ad infinitum. We believe that better solutions are available than the current CALFED Phase 2 alternatives. These include an increased reliance on groundwater storage instead of new dams or reservoirs, providing water for fisheries and watersheds without building new dams, increased water conservation actions for both agriculture and municipalities, and further water quality improvements for Bay-Delta waters.

More dams is <u>not</u> the answer (see enclosure). <u>75,000</u> dams in the USA have come close to destroying most of our river systems and fish, birds, animals and plant life who used to live there. As the Klamath peoples counseled: "Pay attention to the landscape. Pay attention to what the animals are saying to you. Look to the long term." See enclosure re: <u>Totem Salmon book</u>. You should read it.

If CALFED can come up with the right solutions, perhaps a compromise can be reached that will solve all the problems facing California re: water. They surely won't go away.

Ron Wilson

Ron Wilson
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What the Salmon Have to Tell Us About Where We Live

TOTEM SALMON
Life Lessons
From Another Species
By Freeman House
Beacon Press; 228 pages; $25

Reviewed by Michael Black

"Totem Salmon," a lyrical meditation about place, binds together two epic journeys: one about humans, one about fish.

We meet author Freeman House in chest waders, midstream in Northern California's Mattole River. It is 1982. House's beloved river and its dwindling aquatic inhabitants are in dire ecological straits. The 18,000 wild king and coho salmon that once returned to the watershed are down to a few.

As part of a grass-roots ecological restoration effort, House is wrestling clumsily with an endangered king salmon slated for artificial propagation. Working at night, House has trouble discerning where the bone-chilling rain stops and the swollen, icy Mattole begins. He'd certainly rather be home in bed, but he can't be, as this book shows. The members of the Mattole Salmon Watershed Support Group are haunted by ghost fish, and by the belief that salmon can help "save the humans."

From Monterey to the Arctic Circle, the best way to define a Western river is to say that it is a natural watercourse frequented by migratory salmon. Salmon function as exquisitely sensitive barometers to in-stream variations in water temperature or sedimentation. As measures of ecological health, they do for the land what canaries once did for miners underground.

The Mattole River basin is California's westernmost watershed. Not only the state's wettest place, it is also its most seismically active. Resulting from the collision of the Pacific, North American and Gorda tectonic plates, the Kings Range is being thrust skyward faster than any other mountains in North America. Sediments from rising mountains wash downstream at roughly the same rate.

Freeman House

From Monterey to the Arctic Circle, the best way to define a Western river is to say that it is frequented by migratory salmon.

House writes that "salmon probably arrived first (before humans). Their presence can be understood as one of the necessary preconditions for human settlement."

"First salmon" ceremonies throughout California's North Coast tribes were meant to ensure that enough salmon passed upstream to spawn before the indigenous communities downstream partook of their homecoming and gave ritual thanks. The Klamath peoples counseled: "Pay attention to the landscape. Pay attention to what the animals are saying to you. Look to the long term."

Those ancient rituals, practices and languages are largely erased now. They have been replaced by ranching families that go back 130 years, by state agencies like the Bureau of Land Management, by multinational corporations like Maxxam, and by a slew of recent "back-to-the-landers."

Most ranchers abhor environmental regulations, which run counter to private property rights. Extractive industries like timber firms still invoke sovereignty when clear-cutting their land. Rather than comfortably pointing fingers, House and his fellow Mattole locals pose a radical question: "What would happen if we saw ourselves as common inhabitants of a naturally defined part of the planet rather than as members of competitive interest groups isolated from each other by property lines?"

The author seeks to resurrect the Mattole's forgotten natural history and create a new language, inclusive of all its landed and aquatic inhabitants. "The story a place has to tell," he writes, "especially the story of the continuity of human presence in that place, is an absence so large in our culture as to be outside our range of vision."

The lessons in learning to live as "communities of place," he believes, lie within the landscapes and among the creatures surrounding us.

When California's Department of Fish and Game had long since written off the Mattole drainage as "damaged beyond repair," the Salmon Support Group concluded that the fish needed only a little help. Thanks to them, stream-side salmon egg incubators ("hatch boxes") have appeared throughout the wate shed to compensate temporarily for damage spawning habitats.

"[C]ollectively, we were able to imagin our hatchboxes prolifefating under the tende care of residents on every creek with the resul that folks would fall in love with their loca salmon runs, learn to run their ... stead and ranches in ways that would do the ... harm, [and to] defend their watersheds ... ins industrial forces from outside with ... new found passion," House writes.

In April 1991, only 200 salmon returned t the Mattole, where a decade earlier 3,000 ha arrived. But that same year, the Mattole Wa tershed Alliance attracted fully 10 percent o the basin's population to discuss strategies t preserve their heartland.

In summer 1998, divers snorkeling in th Mattole's Mill Creek tributary counted abou 50 juvenile coho salmon in three cold pool Reached by telephone, Mattole Salmo Group biologist Gary Peterson placed 1998 1999's returning salmon estimates at 350 chi nook and 150 coho salmon.

Thanks to the alliance, a reciprocal dia logue about the needs of humans and those o fish has begun. As House, himself a forme commercial salmon fisherman, concludes "[W]e are related by virtue of the places t which we choose to return." May the rest of u grapple with similar truths.

Michael Black is writing "California's Lost Salmon: The Unnatural Policies of Natural Resource Agencies" (forthcoming from the University of California Press). He chairs the California Stidies Association and is on the Bay Institute board.

Edwards Dam in Maine has been demolished to help improve the salmon habitat.

Demolish Outdated Dams That Endanger Fish

SWINGING a sledge hammer, Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt whacked a hole in a 50-year-old dam on Butte Creek in the baking heat of the Sacramento Valley. In Maine, demolition workers clambered across the pre-Civil War Edwards Dam while a backhoe dug away at a shoulder of the cement structure.

Coast to coast, a once-radical notion is taking hold. Dams that helped tame the American landscape to provide power, irrigation, flood control and recreation are coming down.

The demolitions are still rare exceptions in a country dotted with 75,000 dams. But the "decommissioning" represents a major turnabout in official thinking about refashioning nature. Plentiful water and cheap power can come with a hidden price tag: a decline in wildlife, steep government subsidies and legal challenges.

Driving the change in attitude are scientists and environmentalists who claim the cement walls have hurt historic runs of migrating salmon, which are all but blocked from reaching spawning streams. Under such prodding, government authorities such as Babbitt have pushed to remove dams.

"The focus of the environmental movement in the 20th century has been fencing off and preserving the back 20," Babbitt said last year. "But the real action now is on landscapes and watersheds. It is about restoration writ large."

It's a dramatic shift. While environmentalists cheer the demolitions, farmers and power companies are often opposed. Take away a dam and croplands, power grids and summertime marinas and campgrounds can feel the difference.

It's a step to be used sparingly. "The whole economy of San Francisco is based on the Hetch Hetchy system," said Mary-Ann Summerdam, director of natural resources for the California Farm Bureau. Though some environmentalists have argued for tearing out a key dam to restore a breathtaking river valley, such an idea would have huge consequences for water supplies, power and irrigation.

In California, relatively few dams have come down. One example is Battle Creek, a tributary of the Sacramento River near Redding. Pacific Gas & Electric has agreed to tear down five of seven small dams to enable salmon and steelhead to reach spawning areas.

Utility Vice President Leslie H. Everett emphasized that the decision was "unique" and reached only after a raft of federal and state agencies agreed the fish-rearing conditions on the stream were worth the $50 million cost of dam removal.

The biggest fight nationally concerns a string of four dams on the Snake River, which flows into the Columbia River in Washington state. A consortium of fishing groups, Native American tribes and environmentalists are pushing the federal operators to acknowledge that decimated fish runs can only be restored by demolition of the dams built in the 1960s.

These structures typify the general debate. Turbines crank out enough power to light Seattle. Grain from eastern Washington is barged downriver at low cost through locks in the dams. The economic life of the region is linked to dams.

But the barriers are fish-killers. Salmon struggle to find fish ladders designed to lead migrations around the dams. Water temperatures rise in the stopped-up lakes, killing young smolts. Turbine blades chew up fish headed to sea. Removing the dams would give several imperiled runs of fish a clear path to stream beds and lakes where eggs are laid.

When fish begin dying out, dams may have to come down to save endangered wildlife.

Money is found on both sides of the arguments. Fishing groups claim restored runs will lead to more jobs in their ranks. In addition, the dams amount to a giant subsidy to a relative few – farmers, power companies and barge operators.

But, dam supporters counter that there will be higher prices elsewhere. It will cost more to ship grain by rail or truck, irrigation water may go up in price and electric rates could rise too. A consumer walking into this debate can be confused by the dueling numbers.

The change that dam-busting brings has provoked a political deadlock with senators and congressional leaders in Oregon, Washington and California largely opposed to demolition because of the unforeseeable change it will mean.

Though the Clinton administration would dearly love a compromise and to avoid a hard choice, it may not have that luxury. A court-ordered study is under way and expected to answer by year's end whether other methods short of dam destruction can save the salmon runs. Hatcheries, expanded fish ladders and even a system of trucks to carry fish around the killing turbines have fallen short.

If society has the ability to avert the extinction of endangered fish, it should make every effort to avoid that catastrophe, even if it means knocking down dams.

Some of these dams have outlived their usefulness. Demolition, in these cases, can be the first step towards saving the rivers that once flowed freely.